DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 118 CS 010 112

AUTHOR Pesce, Regina T.
TITLE First Grade Reading Instruction: Current Trends in the Northern Valley Regional District.
PUB DATE Jun 90
NOTE 52p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Research; *Educational Trends; Grade 1; Primary Education; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Materials; Reading Material Selection; Reading Teachers; School Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Education; *Teaching Methods; Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS New Jersey (Bergen County); Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the current trends in reading materials and methods used to teach first grade students to read in the Northern Valley Region of Bergen County, New Jersey. Twenty-one first grade teachers responded to a survey which consisted of open-ended questions asking about goals and incentives, multiple choice questions on demographics, and questions on the kinds of teaching materials commonly found in primary classrooms. Results indicated a moving away from using the traditional basal and phonics program toward a whole language approach. Another trend is that those who have been teaching less than 10 years are more likely to use a whole language approach, as are teachers with more education. Results also showed that the majority of reading materials and methods are chosen by the teacher and that administrators who get involved in choosing reading materials usually choose basal and phonic programs. The paper concludes with recommendations made to administrators and teachers on the basis of this research. (Seven tables of data are included; the cover letter and survey mailed to teachers are appended; and 18 references are attached.) (MG)

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First Grade Reading Instruction:
Current Trends in the Northern Valley Regional District

Regina T. Pesce

Closter Public School, Closter, New Jersey

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June, 1990

William Paterson College

Wayne, NJ

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First Grade Reading Instruction: Current Trends in the Northern Valley Regional District.

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Language: English

Document Type: Descriptive Research Paper

Target Audience: Educators

To determine the current trends in reading materials and methods used to teach first grade students to read in the Northern Valley Region of Bergen County, New Jersey, a survey was mailed to all 22 first grade teachers. The first part of the research paper is a historical account of reading education. The next section is an account of the overall trend, according to the responses of 21 first grade teachers in the Northern Valley, which seems to indicate a moving away from using the traditional basal and phonics program towards a whole language approach. Another indication is that those who have been teaching less than ten years are more likely to use a whole language approach as well as teachers with more education. Results also show that the majority of reading materials and methods are chosen by the teacher and that administrators who get involved in choosing reading materials usually choose basal and phonic programs. Also, teachers use basal programs to a greater extent when the programs have been chosen by administrators. Recommendations are made to administrators and teachers at the end of the research paper based on the results of response analysis.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Ciccoricco and the Superintendents and Principals of the Northern Valley Regional District for allowing me to conduct this research project in their district.

I would like to also thank all the Northern Valley first grade teachers, who quickly and completely answered the survey form, without whom this research would not have been possible.

A very special thank you goes to Dr. Feeley for her guidance and patience.

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem

The realm of reading has undergone many changes through the years. The pendulum has swung from an emphasis on teaching isolated reading skills to a more meaning based philosophy. The current trend is captured under the label of Whole Language.

Over the course of the four years I have been teaching, my methods and materials have drastically changed: The basal reader, workbook, teacher's manual, and isolated phonics instruction have been replaced with good literature, poetry, rhymes and chants as well as an emphasis on meaning. The whole language philosophy now prevails.

In my district alone, the Closter Elementary Public School System, many teachers have undergone the same change, and we are all at different stages of the progression towards whole language. It is important to assess the degree to which this change has taken place in our Northern Valley district.

Statement Of The Problem

The major question of the study is: What are the current methods and materials being used to teach first grade students to read in the Northern Valley Region of Bergen County, New Jersey?

A secondary question is: Is there a relationship between the number of years teaching, the educational level of the teacher, the teacher's continued education in the language arts area and the methods and materials used/chosen to teach reading?

A third question concerns with whom the choice of reading materials/methods rests. Is it the adminstrator's choice or the teacher's choice within each school system? What are administrators choosing in relation to teachers' choices?

Definitions

In this study, these following terms will be defined as follows:

1. Ability Group - children read with a group of children who read material at the same level of difficulty, usually used with Basal Readers.

2. Basal Reader - a book of stories, articles, poems, and plays, written specifically to teach reading, whose vocabulary increases in difficulty with each new book. Vocabulary is controlled by initially using high frequency words (the), regular words (bat, cat) and high interest words (boy, play, dog) and progressing to lower frequency words, words with irregular spelling patterns and words which are more abstract.

3. Big Books - Large storybooks with large print which lend themselves to reading with a group.

4. Individual Skills Emphasis Program - children work at their own level and rate on specific reading subskills in workbooks/worksheets supplied by the teacher. Mastery levels are set for progression to next level of difficulty.

5. Individualized Reading Program (IRP) - Children choose reading their own books at their own level and work at their own rate with input from the teacher during conferences.

6. Interest Group - children clustered according to their interest in a book or topic.

7. Language Experience Approach (LEA) - Reading selections are created by the children themselves and are written down by the teacher and used as instructional material for reading.

8. Linguistic Approach - word recognition is taught by focusing on common spelling patterns found in English orthography.

9. Phonics Program - a code-emphasis approach to teaching reading emphasizing a sound-symbol relationship. Letters and sounds are taught in isolation.

10. Predictable Books - books which have similiar words and sentence patterns throughout the book and are about common themes - with illustration to encourage prediction about what the text says and what's coming next.

11. Trade Books - library books or books not written specifically for instruction e.g. Basal Reader.

12. Whole Language - meaning emphasis approach to reading that teaches reading as a holistic activity. Children read whole authentic text, respond orally and through writing. Children write everyday in workshop fashion which follows the writing process. It opposes the basal dominated reading program and the focusing on teaching subskills in isolation.

13. Writing Process - approach to writing which focuses on the steps rather than the final product. What the child reads and the print a child is exposed to will affect his/her writing. Children may start to write on a blank sheet of paper in a global fashion. From there, the child develops a draft. Through conferences with peers and teacher, the draft is revised and finally edited. It is not until this final phase that the spelling corrections are made.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study which will affect the validity and reliability of the results. The interpretation of the questions and items on the survey by the teachers may not conform with the interpretation intended by the author of the survey. Therefore, the possibility of ambiguity exists.

The element of topic bias is also present. Teachers are aware of the current buzz words such as "trade books" and "big books" and, therefore, may give them higher usage ratings than they actually deserve. In the same vein, the awareness on the part of teachers as to the shift from basals and direct phonics instruction to the meaning emphasis or whole language approach may cause teachers to answer questions based on what they think they should be doing rather than what they are actually doing.

Fortunately, due to the high response rate, the percentage returned does not serve as a limitation to the study. In addition it eliminates the assumption that the sample is a self-selected group who returned the surveys because they are more caring and possibly better teachers.

The significance of this study is the comparison of materials and methods used in order to teach the same curriculum. This information is helpful to principals and superintendents. They need to know whether or not their schools are following what is current. It is important to be aware of the teachers' varied approaches to teaching the same curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

> "...methods of the 'good old days' are the foundation of today's instruction. Forty or more years ago, a cornerstone was in place for each of the various approaches to teaching reading from which today's teachers select methods to meet diverse student needs." (Farr, 1981, p. 14)

It has been said that history repeats itself. That is why it is important to look at the historical development of reading instruction. By reflecting on the past we can find the roots of today's theories. We can notice recurring patterns in the methods of teaching reading and possibly, we can predict future trends.

It is evident, through the study of history, that the instructional methods and philosophies of teaching reading were affected by the circumstances of the times and that as these times changed, so did reading practices. Cranney & Miller (1987) state, "...classroom practice and major instructional emphasis is more influenced by the temper of the times and events in society than from the impact of reading research."

So with this in mind, let's start at the beginning - a natural place to start!

In the Beginning...

Smith (1965) tells us that the use of gestures, hand signals, and sign language were the first forms of communication. Primitive man expressed himself by using his hands. Evolving from gestures came the creation of crude writing implements. Stories were recorded in stone in the form of pictures. Over a long period of time man developed his verbalization skills from grunts to words and eventually created an alphabet. Prior to the United States Revolutionary War, religion greatly influenced the teaching of reading. Reading was taught by the use of the Bible and prayers such as the Apostles' Creed. Much of the colonial reading materials were imported from England due to America's lack of sufficient industrial capabilities such as the printing press (Reutzel, 1981).

As early as 1642, parents were required by law to ensure that their children were able to read. "The Old Deluder Satan" Act mandated that towns whose populations exceeded 50 families were to appoint a teacher of reading and writing (Ornstein & Levine, 1985).

The Hornbook was the first piece of American reading instructional material. It was a single sheet of parchment paper which was laminated with a cover made from cattle horns. Primers printed in America were the Protestant Primer (1685) and the New England Primer (1683). The content of the primers was catechetical based and passages such as the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments were usually memorized. After completing a primer, the children then learned to read using the Bible and usually once again passages were memorized (Reutzel, 1981).

Smith tells us that the alphabet, spelling of syllables and words, memorization and reading aloud were the methods used to instruct. She goes on to state that beginning readers were taught using the alphabetical method because that was the only method they had known at the time.

Ornstein and Levine (1985) cite two early philosophers whose work had impact on education:

During the pre-revolutionary time (1632 - 1704), John Locke advocated the "learn by doing" attitude which is the basis for the manipulative theories of today.

Jean Jacques Rousseau's influences in the seventeen hundreds can also be felt today. The Swiss born French theorist was noted for his novel Emile which depicts a boy's education from infancy to adulthood. He advocated a child-centered curriculum. Rousseau advocated a curriculum based on the child's interests and needs rather than a curriculum that forced the child to conform to a prescribed program of learning. Rousseau's ideas were the forerunner to the "romantic" view of child development. The romantic view is one in which children create their own reality rather than learning to deal with information given to them in a final form by adults. The Whole Language philosophy reflects the romantic view (Ornstein & Levine, 1985).

Post Revolutionary War to the 1900s

Ornstein and Levine (1985) note that after the war, books turned from religion to greater support of nationalistic values. Noah Webster dedicated a great part of his life (1758 - 1843) to writing books following this philosophy. He felt American schools would be shaped by the books which were read. Children would learn to act as Americans. Webster authored Webster's Spelling Book as well as the American Dictionary.

Around 1836, William Holmes McGuffey published the first McGuffey Readers. These books promoted the ideas of virtuous living and hard work based on the Anglo-Saxon Protestant Ethic. The readers included pieces by Patrick Henry, Daniel Webster, and George Washington. These were the first graded readers "and paved the way for a totally graded system, which had its beginnings in the 1840s" (Ornstein & Levine, 1985, p. 164).

Early 1900

The McGuffey reader was the predominant means of teaching reading prior to the 1890s. We see the rise of the phonic method and sight words in the beginning of the 1900s.

Also according to Farr (1981), "the seeds for today's emphasis on comprehension were sown: the study of reading as saccadic eye movements and pauses encompassing units of meaning was already affecting instructional methods" (p. 14).

Farr goes on to explain that an emphasis on research into reading disabilities took place between 1910 and 1920. Even back then there existed a debate over the most successful methods of teaching reading. Educators argued for and against a strong emphasis on phonics instruction, synthetic alphabets, and methods to instruct students on initial and final blend sounds.

Farr tells us that there was a focus on silent reading in the 1920s. This emphasis was linked to the development of standardized testing. In the 1930s, the focus on silent reading carried over and researchers tried to establish definitions of silent reading, thereby distinguishing it from oral reading. This search for understanding of the relationship between language activities continues today. Studies done in the 1930s also looked at reading interests and comprehension.

Farr concludes: "These studies are intricately related in developing current understanding of reading as a meaningful activity enabling the reader to acquire needed information and ideas of personal interest. This vein of research coupled with later linguistic influences directs many of todays researchers seeking a description of reading as a whole language activity" (p.15).

Later 1900s

Remedial reading and **reading readiness** also find their roots in the 1930s and continued through the 1960s. Close to a child's start in first grade, a reading readiness test was administered not to determine who needed readiness skills, but to find out how long a child should spend in the readiness program. The idea was that the readiness program would be good for all children, "ready or not". Publishers of readiness tests also published readiness workbooks which became the program (Durkin, 1983).

The "language experience approach" also appeared during the 1930s and was used by teachers who wanted another means of teaching reading aside from the controlled vocabulary method. These teachers were concerned with using materials to teach reading that were meaningful and relevant to the reader. The basis for using syntactic and semantic clues in conjunction with phonic skills was also founded in the 1930s (Farr, 1981).

Around 1955 and the advent of Sputnik, reading instruction experienced a period of confusion. It was felt American education was not producing scholars, and the Russians were getting ahead of us; thus, Why Johnny Can't Read by Rudolph Flesch appeared on the scene.

Flesch condemned the then current means of teaching reading by a sight word method. He backed a phonic approach as the best method and a "back to the basics" (Chall, 1967).

The debate reached a peak in 1959, at which point the National Conference on Research in English appointed a special committee. This committee researched the problem and found the code-emphasis method to be more successful in the teaching of reading up to the third grade (Chall, 1967).

The Era of Skill Emphasis

From 1965 to present, basal readers have dominated the market. Basals spanned grades K-8. In the first grade, basal readers usually consist of approximately three pre-primers, one primer, and one first grade reader with one workbook to accompany each level. Most supplementary materials produced by the publishers were in workbook or kit form and all were accompanied by teacher manuals (Robinson, 1972).

In addition in the 1980s, increasing amounts of software programs in reading became available for computers. Unfortunately, they were mainly drill and practice which is, in essence, putting a workbook on a computer disc.

Also during this time, there seemed to be more trade books or library books written and published for children. Children were beginning to read and/or receive reading instruction in Kindergarten.

In 1967, Chall's Learning to Read: The Great Debate was published. This dealt with the ever present controversy prevalent in reading instruction for almost 150 years, the tug 'o war between the code emphasis approach and the meaning emphasis approach.

Partially to validate the effectiveness of code emphasis or meaning emphasis approaches, the federal government established the Cooperative Research Program in first grade reading instruction. Approximately 27 research studies were launched which compared the basal reader method with other instructional approaches such as programmed reading and emphasis on phonics and/or linguistics. The following conclusions were drawn as a result of the studies:

1. There is no one method that is so outstanding that it should be used to the exclusion of others.

2. The effectiveness of any one approach appears to be increased when it is broadened by addition of other instructional components. For example, a basic program's effectiveness is increased when writing experiences are added.

3. Specific approaches to first grade reading instruction appeared to increase children's achievement in certain instructional outcomes but are weak in other outcomes. Another method may develop different patterns of growth. This observation gives hope to the possibility that we may find combinations of approaches that will encourage overall balanced reading growth.

4. As would be expected, there was greater variation between the teachers within the methods than there was between the methods. This again points up the importance of the teacher's role in learning (Smith, 1986, p. 33).

In the 1970s, teaching comprehension was broken down into a variety of subskills. Teachers appeared to assess and drill more than they taught comprehension when following much of the strategies in the basal manuals. These statements were a result of Durkin's observations of the teaching of reading in grades three to six.

Durkin describes reading comprehension instruction as "explaining, illustrating, or questioing to clarify, extend, or raise the level of comprehension" (Harris, 1985, p. 488). In Durkin's observations of third through sixth grade classes, reading comprehension instruction, as defined, was rare. Comprehension instruction consisted of assessing the extent to which reading material was understood as well as completing workbook pages without guided practice. Instead, teachers should have taught skills and strategies which students could apply to facilitate reading comprehension. There seemed to be an emphasis on the product rather than the process. According to Durkin, one percent of the reading period was devoted to the actual teaching of reading comprehension. (Harris points out that Durkin's study has been criticized on methodological grounds.)

The Whole Language Invasion

Teachers frequently use the language experience approach (LEA) alongside basal readers. During the 1970s the LEA approach became part of the larger effort to focus on "whole language." Kenneth Goodman introduced the new view of the reading process whereby miscues gave insight into the individual's reading process.

Goodman (1967) focused us on the reader's use of prior experience, phonological knowledge, lexical knowledge, syntactic knowledge, and semantic knowledge. The change in view from reading errors to miscues can be found in his landmark article, "Reading, A Pscholinguistic Guessing Game."

The 1985 report of the Commission on Reading advises that more time should be devoted to comprehension instruction rather than on workbook exercises. Although phonics instruction should be emphasized in grades one and two, it shouldn't permeate the whole reading program. Much can be learned about the orthography when children try to write through invented spelling. (Becoming a Nation of Readers, p. 118-119.)

Currently, a connection is being made between reading and writing. Reading and writing are complementary, and one area can help improve the child's abilities in the other. Children need to be surrounded by good literature to "make" good literature themselves through writing. Children learn the process the real authors go through to create books. Children can read about how authors go through stages before arriving at the final product. As part of the writing process, "no distinctions are made between the reading of children's writing and the writing of professionals. Both are treated as important writings" (Graves, 1986, p. 76).

Burchby (1988) supports these ideas as she tells us:

"Becoming an author comes naturally from immersion in children's literature and being given a strong sense of being a writer" (p. 121.).

Although this paper is about current trends in reading, it would be negligent to omit the reference to the reading-writing connection which is a branch of the whole language trend. It is the emphasis on meaning, the natural development of oral and written language, and the use of print as a means of communication that stimulates the relationship.

Whole language is the current trend. Everyone wants to jump on the band wagon. Principals want their teachers to be teaching the "in" way. And teachers are now caught up in a myriad of buzz words such as **trade books** and **big books**. But do these professionals actually understand the philosophy of Whole Language? Or are they merely giving lip service to Whole Language and using the materials for display? As noted by Judith Thelen:

> Now I see another trend, and I am afraid. Whole language is becoming a fashionable buzz word... four teachers came to me concerned because their principal had mandated that they teach Whole Language this year. They did not have a clue as to what it was. (p. 1)

Thelen goes on to cite other examples of the misuse or misunderstanding of Whole Language Philosophy. First grade teachers who in the same breathe are thrilled to see children who love to read as a result of using real books, are unsettled and confused because the same children do not exhibit a mastery of phonics.

Perhaps some of the confusion on the part of teachers is the fact that whole language can not be assessed by these teachers via the traditional means. Cambourne and Turbill (1990) explain that teachers cannot use traditional assessment procedures to access whole language, and if they do they may feel uneasy about what they are doing.

The reason this occurs is because the means of assessment needs to be updated and changed alongside the changing philosophy of teaching reading. As whole language patterns itself after the natural development of language, perhaps the means of assessment needs to be more natural. Standardized tests as we now know them, may become (and should become) absolute. As stated by Cambourne and Turbill (1990):

> . . . assessment based on more naturalistic data collection and interpretation procedures is more commensurate with the theoretic principles that underpin holistic approaches to teaching language . . . data from a more naturalistic, responsive approach to assessment are not only more useful, rich, and valuable than sterile numbers but they are equally vigorous, trustworthy, and scientific. (p. 345-346)

Teacher confusion over the multitude of philosophies and methods of teaching reading coupled with the affect of the sterile standardized test is addressed in Mosenthal's appropriately titled article: "The Whole Language Approach: Teachers between a rock and a hard place" (1989). Again, the teacher's dilemma over the controversy between the whole language approach and standardized test scores is made apparent. Mosenthal points out that reading means different things to different people. And with the individual interpretations comes the differences in methodologies which require different and appropriate means of assessment. An academic approach to the teaching of reading calls for academic means of assessment such as the traditional approach of the standardized test.

On the other hand, there exists a "romantic" approach to education which fosters self-confidence, self awareness, self-appreciation, and self understanding. This approach, which stems from the open classroom and is known today as whole language, recognizes the importance of the background knowledge and experiences of the reader as well as their individual interpretations of printed matter based on their individual schemata. Each student is able to naturally develop at his/her own rate. Today, we see the trend towards this approach. Basal readers are being replaced by good literature, and staff development programs are pushing this "new" philosophy. The problem is that the means of assessment have not been updated to

reflect this change. Portfolio assessments and other informal approaches are being suggested. States are mandating more standardized testing which coincides with the academic approach to teaching reading. The article states a need for a compromise between the two approaches.

Mosenthal concludes: "Here we have the distinct mismatch between trying to promote individual differences in the romantic approach and a uniformly knowledgeable citizenry in the academic. Teachers, responsible for both coping with the complexity and time constraints of the task, find themselves caught betwixt and between" (p. 629). It should be noted the romantic approach as advocated by Mosenthal allows students to develop at their own rate and resembles the curriculum supported by Rousseau in his book, Emile.

In another view of the current trend, Hemysfeld (1989) wished to create a combined program, a balance between whole language and the traditional method. Hemysfeld feels that the energy and excitement of Whole Language should be combined with the teaching of phonics and reading comprehension skills. She states that "Purists tell us we cannot have both whole language and a skills approach because they contradict each other. We have lived with other contradictions however, and we can probably learn to live with this one. Each theory brings strengths, and until we have definitive data, we should use common sense and experience to create a combination program" (p. 68).

The same viewpoint is stated in Hillerich's article, "Whole Language - The Whole Truth" (1990) He opens the article by reminiscing on his column of two years prior which discussed whole language from the standpoint that it was the current philosophy and that the pendulum seems to swing between this and skill-drill. He now wants to stop that pendulum and find a happy medium between the two methods/philosophies of teaching reading. "Basically, we need to develop skill and interest. Skill without interest is futile, but interest without skill is frustrating" (p. 27).

Hillerich (1990) says that the research to compare the effectiveness of whole language as opposed to a more structured approach is like comparing apples and oranges. He highlights research done by Stahl and Miller in which they took a look at the Cooperative First Grade Studies in regard to language experience as well as 42 other studies of the whole language type philosophy. Although, Whole Language came-out a bit ahead at the readiness level, the conclusion was that all-in-all there was no significant difference between the effectiveness of the two viewpoints, Basal vs. Whole Language. In defense of the basals, he states that the study compared whole language to out-dated basals and acknowledges that the current trends have impacted upon the more recently published basals as the quality of literature is upgraded.

Yet, again in the article by Fountas and Hannegan (1989) we see teacher confusion and uncertainty upon immersion into whole

language. They cite many questions educators have pondered over such as: What is whole language, anyway? Can we use our basal readers in whole language teaching? Aren't many of the practical classroom applications similar to the methods and materials characteristic of the integrated curriculums and open classroom of the 60s and 70s? What implications does whole language have for intermediate grades? Fountas and Hannegan explain the philosophy which teaches skills within the context of good literature. They answer questions about the integrated curriculum giving support to whole language. They also indirectly point out the need for group support meetings such as inservice education as schools change from a skill-drill philosophy to that of whole language.

And amid all this chaos over the best method of reading instruction, Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985). tells us:

> America will become a nation of readers when verified practices of the best teachers in the best schools can be introduced throughout the country (p.120).

The following chapters will describe the current methods and materials used to teach reading in the Northern Valley Region. Please note that this paper does not intend to judge the success of any one method or material over another but rather the aim is to report the trends, the methods, and materials currently being used in reading instruction.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods And Procedures

Through the review of literature, one can see that there are many philosophies about teaching reading. Likewise, there is a myriad of methods and materials that can be used to teach children to read. Through the years, particular methods have come and gone and then reappeared in a slightly different form years later. In this study my aim was to determine the kinds of methods and materials used today to teach beginning reading in a defined area in northern New Jersey.

Subjects

My focus was on the Northern Valley Region of Bergen County. There are seven districts/towns which feed into the two high schools of the Northern Valley Regional High School District. The socioeconomic status of the Northern Valley District is middle to upper-middle class. Students from the towns of Closter, Demarest, and Haworth attend Northern Valley Regional High School at Demarest. Students from the towns of Northvale, Norwood, Old Tappan, and Harrington Park attend Northern Valley Regional High School at Old Tappan. Also included in the study was the town of Alpine. Although Alpine students do not attend either of the Northern Valley high schools, the Alpine Elementary School is part of Region III Special Education, and its teachers attend curriculum meetings and workshops along with the Northern Valley Regional staff.

The sample specifically included all the first grade teachers within the eight towns. In total, this amounted to 22 teachers of first grade students.

Of the 22 teachers surveyed, all but one responded. The 21 teachers are responsible for teaching reading and language arts. Their teaching background is quite diverse, with teacher experience ranging anywhere from one to four years up to over 21 years as can be seen in Table 1. All teachers have at least a Bachelor's degree plus 15 additional credits. Eleven have completed a Master's program plus additional credits as can be seen in Table 2. There is quite a span in the number of years that the last course or workshop in reading was taken, ranging from 1977 to the present.

Table 1

Number of Years Teaching and Corresponding Number of 1st Grade Teachers In The NV District

N = 21

Number of Years Teaching	Number of Teachers
0 - 5	3
6 - 10	3
11 - 15	6
16 - 20	5
20+	4

Table 2

Educational Degree and Corresponding

Number of 1st Grade Teachers In The NV District

N = 21

Degree	Number of Teachers
BA	0
BA + 15	6
BA + 30	1
MA	3
MA+	11

Instruments

The instrument used to gather the data was a survey. This survey form consisted of open-ended questions which asked about goals and incentives, multiple choice questions on demographics, and questions on the kinds of teaching materials commonly found in primary classrooms. The teachers were asked to respond on how much they used each using a graded scale from one to five, with one representing never and five representing always. (See appendix A)

This survey had content validity since it was reviewed by a group of teachers completing the Masters in Reading program at William Paterson College. These teachers' suggestions for additions and deletions were considered during the revision stage. In addition, the survey was reviewed by the eight

Superintendents of the eight school districts who comprise the Northern Valley Superintendent's Association.

Procedures

After the survey form was approved by the reading teachers in the Masters program and the Northern Valley Superintendents, the surveys were mailed directly to the teachers in their respective schools. They were given approximately two weeks to complete the survey. Self-addressed, stamped return envelopes, and a cover letter were enclosed with each survey. Returns were to be made anonymously, with only the town being indicated on the survey. The data obtained from the survey will be summarized in the tables to follow.

The high percentage of returned surveys will serve as an accurate indicator as to philosophies, methods, and materials being used by the first grade teachers in the Northern Valley district today.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The survey form was used to collect data used to determine the current methods and materials being used to teach first grade students to read in the Northern Valley Region. Twenty one teachers of first grade in the Northern Valley Region responded, and the information is organized in tables 3 through 5 to show the relationship between the number of years teaching, the educational level of the teacher and the methods and materials chosen to teach reading. Tables 6 and 7 show with whom the choice of reading materials/methods rests and what administrators are using in comparison to teachers choices.

Frequency of Use of Materials

Table 3 shows the frequency of use of reading materials and methods for the 21 teachers surveyed. Overall, 57% of the teachers indicated that they used basal and workbooks always or often, while 29% indicated that they seldom or never used these materials. Basals have been in existence for centuries but it seems that today teachers are finally beginning to move away from basal programs to use other methods and materials. Although 62% of those surveyed stated that they used trade books always/often, 19% stated that they seldom/never used trade books. The use of trade books follows Jean Jacques Rousseau's theory that advocated a curriculum based on the interests and needs of the child rather than a curriculum that forced the child to conform to a prescribed program of learning. It is interesting to note that 71% cited that they use poems, chants, songs, and rhymes always/often and no one indicated

Table 3

Frequency of Use of Reading Materials/Methods

N = 21

	Never/ Seldom	Occasionally	Always/ Often	No Response
Basal & Workbook	29%	14%	57%	-
Trade Books	19%	9%	62%	10%
Big Books	29%	24%	33%	14%
LEA	-	48%	43%	9%
Phonics Program	14%	33%	38%	15%
Linguistic Approach	24%	14%	43%	19%
Individualized Skills Emphasis Program	38%	33%	24%	5%
Poems/Chants Songs/Rhymes	-	29%	71%	-
IDR	33%	19%	38%	10%

that they seldom or never use these methods. The same is true of the LEA approach; no one indicated using it as seldom or never. Although the LEA appeared during the 1930's, teachers today still greatly use this approach as another means of teaching reading aside from the controlled word method of the basal programs.

Big books scored evenly across the board with 29% stating usage as seldom or never and 33% as always or often.

While 38% indicated that they used a phonics program always or often, 14% revealed that they seldom or never used a phonics program. Table 3 supports Chall's conclusions in Learning to Read: The Great Debate: teachers do not use one method to the exclusion of others. Perhaps this is so because the effectiveness of one approach seems to be increased by the use of other instructional components, as stated by Chall. Some teachers who use combinations of approaches may have found an overall balanced reading program.

Materials and Years of Teaching

Table 4 summarizes the responses indicating the frequency of use of selected reading materials and methods by respondents' years of teaching. It is interesting to note that 67% of those teaching 0 to 10 years never or seldom used basals and workbooks, while 100% of those teaching 21 or more years used basals and workbooks always or often. It was apparent that, as the years went up, so did the percent of those who use basals always or often. One hundred

Table 4

Frequency of Use of Selected Reading Materials/

Methods by Respondents' Years of Teaching

	Years of Teaching	N	Never/ Seldom	Occasionally	Always/ Often	No Response
Basal and Workbook	0 - 5	3	67%	-	33%	-
	6 - 10	3	67%	-	33%	-
	11 - 15	6	33%	17%	50%	-
	16 - 20	5	-	40%	60%	-
	21+	4	-	-	100%	-
Trade Books	0 - 5	3	-	-	100%	-
	6 - 10	3	-	33%	67%	-
	11 - 15	6	-	17%	83%	-
	16 - 20	5	20%	-	60%	20%
	21+	4	75%	25%	-	-
Phonics Program	0 - 5	3	33%	33%	33%	-
	6 - 10	3	-	33%	67%	-
	11 - 15	6	33%	17%	33%	17%
	16 - 20	5	-	60%	20%	20%
	21+	4	-	25%	75%	-
LEA	0 - 5	3	-	-	67%	33%
	6 - 10	3	-	33%	67%	-
	11 - 15	6	-	33%	67%	-
	16 - 20	5	-	60%	20%	20%
	21+	4	-	100%	-	-
Big Books	0 - 5	3	33%	-	67%	-
	6 - 10	3	33%	-	67%	-
	11 - 15	6	17%	33%	50%	-
	16 - 20	5	60%	40%	-	-
	21+	4	50%	25%	-	25%

percent of those teaching 0 to 5 years stated that they always or often used trade books, while 75% of those teaching 21 or more years indicated that they never or seldom used trade books. Again we see a contrast in the use of phonics programs. While 33% of those teaching 0 to 5 years stated they used phonics always or often, 75% of those in the 21+ group stated they used phonics always or often. Although 67% of those teaching 0 to 15 stated they always or often used the LEA approach, no one in the 21+ group indicated that they seldom or never use the LEA approach.

Another significant difference was in the use of Big Books. While 67% of those in the 0 to 10 years of teaching groups stated that they used Big Books always or often, no respondents who were teaching 16 years or more indicated that they used Big Books always or often. In addition, 60% of those teaching 16 to 10 years and 50% of those teaching 21+ years indicated that they never or seldom use Big Books to teach reading.

Overall it seems that those with less years of teaching have jumped onto the Whole Language band wagon as indicated by their greater use of big books, LEA, and trade books. In contrast, those teaching 16 or more years seem to favor more traditional methods/materials such as basal and phonic programs. Is this a result of what is currently being taught in college education courses? Most likely so! Or is it that, "People are comfortable with what they know."

There also seems to be some confusion among teachers as to what methods and materials they would like to use as can be seen by those who occasionally use this or that. We know that part of the confusion is to be blamed on the use of traditional means of assessment to evaluate reading achievement in general.

As stated in Chapter 2, this cannot be done. The means of assessment needs to be updated to match the methods used in the new philosophy of teaching reading.

Materials and Education Level

Table 5 reports the frequency of use of reading materials and methods by the respondent's education. It is interesting to note that teachers with a BA + 15 credits and BA + 30 credits or Master's degree, 66% and 75%, respectively, use basals and workbooks always or often. In contrast, 45% of teachers having a masters degree plus additional credits indicated that they seldom or never used a basal program. With Big Books there was a major difference between teachers holding a BA + 15 credits and teachers with a BA + 30/MA or a master's degree plus additional credits. No one in the BA + 15 group indicated that they always or often used Big Books while 50% of those in the BA + 30/MA group and 45% of those in the MA + group indicated that they always or often used Big Books.

Once again, the tables indicate that those with more education seem to lean toward the whole language approach and away from basal and phonics programs. Many teachers seem to be integrating traditional and whole language methods. This follows Hemysfeld's (1989) view that the energy and excitement of Whole Language should be combined with the teaching of phonics and reading comprehension skills. Skills can be taught within the context of good literature as suggested by Funtas and Hannegan (1989).

Table 5

Frequency of Use of Reading Materials/Methods by Respondents' Education

	BA + 15 N = 6				BA + 30/MA N = 4				MA + N = 11			
	Never/ Seldom	Occas- ionally	Always/ Often	No Response	Never/ Seldom	Occas- ionally	Always/ Often	No Response	Never/ Seldom	Occas- ionally	Always/ Often	No Response
Basal	17%	17%	66%	-	-	25%	75%	-	45%	10%	45%	-
Trade Books	-	-	100%	-	25%	-	75%	-	27%	18%	36%	19%
Big Books	50%	50%	-	-	50%	-	50%	-	18%	18%	45%	19%
LEA	-	50%	33%	17%	-	25%	75%	-	10%	45%	36%	9%
IDR	50%	17%	33%	-	50%	-	50%	-	18%	36%	36%	10%
Phonics Program	-	50%	33%	17%	25%	-	75%	-	18%	46%	27%	9%
Linguistic Approach	17%	17%	33%	33%	25%	-	50%	25%	27%	18%	45%	10%
Individual Skills Emphasis Program	33%	50%	17%	-	25%	25%	50%	-	45%	27%	18%	10%

Decision Making and Use of Materials

Table 6 summarizes the responses concerning who makes decisions about materials and methods. Is the choice made by administrators and reading supervisors? Is the choice left up to the classroom teacher? Or, is the choice a joint decision between teachers and administrators? Overall, according to the perceptions of these teachers, the choices seem to be left to the teachers. The only areas in which decisions were made by others were basal programs and phonics programs. Although 57% indicated that the teacher chose the basal program, 24% of the respondents indicated that the administrators or others chose the program, and 19% indicated that the decision was a joint one between teacher and administrator.

Table 7 relates the teachers' perceptions of the source of the decision to use basals to how often the teacher indicated the actual use of the program. It is interesting to note that when the choice of the basal program was made by the administrator alone, 80% of the teachers indicated that they used it always or often, and 20% said that they used it occasionally. When the teacher and the administrator jointly choose the program, 60% of the teachers indicated that they used the basal program always or often. When teachers were permitted to choose the basal program, only 46% used the program always or often.

Writing in Grade One

The 1980s writing-as-a-process movement in which children and teachers write in a workshop manner (Graves, 1983) and the advice of the Commission on Reading (Becoming a Nation of Readers, 1985) to include more real writing in

Table 6

Who Makes Decisions About Material/Methods?

N = 21

	Teacher	Administrator or other	Teacher & Admin.	No Response
Basal	57%	24%	19%	-
Trade Books	90%	-	5%	5%
Big Books	62%	-	5%	33%
LEA	67%	-	10%	23%
Phonics	66%	10%	10%	14%

Table 7

Comparison of Who Makes the Decision to Use Basals and How Often the Basals are Used.

Teacher Decision N = 11			Administrator or other Decision N = 5			Teacher or Administrator Decision N = 5		
Never/ Seldom	Occas- ionally	Always/ Often	Never/ Seldom	Occas- ionally	Always/ Often	Never/ Seldom	Occas- ionally	Always/ Often
36%	18%	46%	-	20%	80%	40%	-	60%

our reading programs point to the reading writing connection. Reading and writing are complementary, and one area can help improve the child's capabilities in the other. This viewpoint seems to be shared by the majority of teachers in the Northern Valley Region. Nineteen teachers (of the 21 surveyed) indicated that they offered children, or were learning to launch, writing workshop. Only two teachers did not offer a writing workshop. Sixteen teachers indicated that their children wrote daily, and four indicated that their children wrote three to four times a week. One teacher responded that her children wrote weekly.

One can see that, overall, first-grade teachers in the Northern Valley are giving children many opportunities to write. All teachers offered some form of a reading incentive program encouraging children to choose their own books.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

To determine the current trends in reading materials and methods used in first grade in the Northern Valley Region, a survey was mailed to all 22 first-grade teachers. The 95% response rate shows the interest and concerns of these teachers and makes the following conclusions really representative of the teachers' perceptions.

Conclusions

According to the survey responses of the 21 first-grade teachers in the Northern Valley District, it may be concluded that:

1. The overall trend seems to be that teachers are moving away from using traditional basal and phonics programs in a lock-step way towards using big book, children's literature, and writing workshop in a more whole language approach.

2. Those who have been teaching less than 10 years are more likely to be using a whole language approach. Those teaching 16 or more years are more likely to be using a traditional basal approach to teach reading. One possible explanation for this is the trend for college educators to place a greater emphasis on the whole language approach in recent years than was done in the past.

3. Teachers with more education are slightly more apt to favor a whole language approach than those with less education. Again, this might be related to the recency of their education courses.

4. The majority of reading materials and methods are chosen by the teacher. However, administrators who get involved in choosing reading materials usually choose basal and phonic programs.

5. Teachers use basal programs to a greater extent when the programs have been chosen by administrators.

6. Teachers are emphasizing writing more in their first grades, with a large majority offering writing workshop on a regular basis.

Recommendations

The following recommendations to teachers and administrators can be made as a result of the research completed.

Teachers

Teachers should keep themselves updated as to the current methods and materials available to teach reading. This can be done through networking with other first grade teachers in the Northern Valley District. This can also be accomplished by attending workshops, inservice programs, and graduate courses in reading and writing. Teachers should also subscribe to professional publications such as The Reading Teacher and Language Arts.

Administrators

Recommendations to administrators include organizing inservices and making many more opportunities available for teachers to attend workshops on reading and the language arts. They should establish networks to allow teachers to share and trade ideas on a particular level. Teachers can use one another as a resource by visiting the classrooms of others. They should encourage teachers to get involved using some form of incentive such as released time.

Administrators should have access to professional publications in the reading field. Occasionally, they should circulate an appropriate article of interest to stimulate the teachers as well as to show their interest in keeping on top of current trends in literacy education.

As teachers and administrators in the Northern Valley District turn their schools into literate communities of learners and sharers, they will be moving toward the ideal offered by the Commission on Reading in Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985):

> "America will become a nation of readers when verified practices of the best teachers in the best schools can be introduced throughout the country" (p. 120).

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March 5, 1990

Dear Colleague:

I am a first grade teacher at the Closter Tenakill School and I am completing my final semester at William Paterson College from which I will receive a **Masters in Reading** in May. The enclosed questionnaire is part of the research project for my **Thesis.** It will be greatly appreciated if you would take a few minutes out of your busy schedule to complete this questionnaire which has been approved by **The Northern Valley Administrators Association.**

For your convenience, I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope and request that you return the questionnaire by **March 16, 1990.**

Thank you for your support and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Regina Pesce

c: Superintendent
Principal

READING SURVEY

1. School District. (Check one)

Alpine	___	Haworth	___
Closter	___	Northvale	___
Demarest	___	Norwood	___
Harrington Park	___	Old Tappan	___

2. How many years have you been teaching? (Check one)

0 - 5	___
6 - 10	___
11 - 15	___
16 - 20	___
21 +	___

3. Educational level. (Check one)

BA	___
BA + 15	___
BA + 30	___
MA	___
MA +	___

4. When was the last time you took a course/workshop in Reading? (Specify year only)

_____

5. Describe your goals for developing your young readers.

_____

_____

_____

6. **Reading Materials**

To what extent do you use the following? (Circle number) Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always

Who chooses the program/ materials? (Check Column)

		Teacher	Administration or Other
A. **Basal Reader Program** (Specify Publisher) _____			
Basal & Workbook	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
Basal Only	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____
Workbook Only	1 2 3 4 5	_____	_____

7. To what extent do you use the following for reading?

	(Circle number) Never				Always
Poems, Chants, Songs, Rhymes	1	2	3	4	5
Magazines (Specify)_____	1	2	3	4	5
Newspapers (Specify)_____	1	2	3	4	5
Computers (Specify Software)_____ _____	1	2	3	4	5
Reading Logs	1	2	3	4	5
Other (Specify)_____	1	2	3	4	5

8. How do you group children for instruction?
(Check one)

Ability groups _____
Interest groups _____
Individualized (Children choose own groups) _____
Other (Specify) _____

9. Do you offer any reading incentive programs? _____
If yes, describe._____
_____
_____

10. Writing (Composition)
a. Do you teach writing as a process (writing workshop)?_____
_____

b. How often do your children write (compose)?
Daily _____
3 - 4 times a week _____
Weekly _____

THANK YOU
PLEASE RETURN TO:
Regina Pesce
934 C Boulevard
New Milford, NJ 07646